

IRS



News Release

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**TAXPAYERS FACE SEVERAL APRIL 15 DEADLINES;
TIME RUNNING OUT FOR SOME UNCLAIMED REFUNDS,
LAST CHANCE TO APPLY FOR OFFSHORE COMPLIANCE INITIATIVE**

WASHINGTON – As April 15 draws near, the Internal Revenue Service reminds taxpayers that this year's Tax Day represents several important deadlines.

Besides the traditional filing deadline for most individuals, Tuesday marks the deadline for applying to the Offshore Voluntary Compliance Initiative, filing to claim more than \$2.5 billion in unclaimed 1999 refunds and making 2002 contributions to several retirement and education savings accounts.

"Time is running out for taxpayers," said IRS Acting Commissioner Bob Wenzel. "Whether it's a chance to get an unclaimed refund or avoid an offshore audit, the window of opportunity is closing for the final time."

The April 15 deadline takes on added meaning for several groups of taxpayers, including those with:

UNREPORTED OFFSHORE INCOME. In January, the IRS announced an initiative to encourage the voluntary disclosure of unreported income by people who have used offshore payment cards or other offshore financial arrangements improperly to avoid paying taxes. People have until Tuesday to apply for benefits of the Offshore Voluntary Compliance Initiative (OVCI).

Under the initiative, eligible people who step forward will not face civil fraud and information return penalties. However, taxpayers will still have to pay back taxes, interest and certain accuracy or delinquency penalties. Eligible taxpayers who come forward will also avoid criminal prosecution.

"If you have unreported offshore income, this is as good a deal as you'll ever get," Wenzel said. "Taxpayers who don't come forward face an audit or even criminal prosecution."

To apply, taxpayers must notify the IRS in writing and provide their name, taxpayer identification number, current address, daytime phone number and certain promoter information. Those seeking information by telephone should call: 215-516-3537 (not toll-free). Full details on the Offshore Voluntary Compliance Initiative are available on the IRS Web site at www.irs.gov.

UNCLAIMED 1999 REFUNDS. Tuesday marks the last chance for an estimated.

(more)

1.9 million taxpayers to claim more than \$2.5 billion in refunds they did not file for in 1999. Some of these people may have had taxes withheld from their wages but had too little income to require filing a tax return. Others may not have had any tax withheld but would be eligible for the refundable Earned Income Tax Credit.

However, in order to collect the money, the 1999 return must be filed with an IRS office no later than April 15. The law provides most taxpayers with a three-year window of opportunity for claiming a refund. If no return is filed to claim the refund within three years, the money becomes property of the U.S. Treasury. There is no penalty assessed by the IRS for filing a late return qualifying for a refund.

“We want eligible taxpayers to get their 1999 refunds. But if they don’t file, they lose their chance for a refund,” Wenzel said.

Copies of 1999 forms are available on the IRS Web site at IRS.gov. More information is available in IRS News Release 2003-13.

IRAs AND EDUCATION ACCOUNTS. For most individual taxpayers, April 15 is the deadline for making 2002 contributions for Coverdell Education Savings Accounts and Roth and Traditional Individual Retirement Accounts (IRAs) for 2002.

“There’s still time for taxpayers to get the 2002 tax advantages from these special accounts,” Wenzel said.

For those filing 2002 returns in the next few days, the IRS reminds taxpayers to double-check their return for accuracy, use free IRS resources for tax help and consider electronic options for filing and paying.

The IRS Web site has forms and publications for downloading, links to companies offering free electronic filing, interactive tax aids and answers to frequently asked questions.

The IRS toll-free help line for individuals - 1-800-829-1040 - is available from 7:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. weekdays. It will also be open from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. this Saturday and Sunday, and until midnight on April 14 and 15. All hours are local time, except for Alaska and Hawaii, which should reference Pacific Time. Many local IRS offices will be open this Saturday for walk-in assistance. The IRS Web site has local office schedules.

Those who cannot complete their returns on time may request an automatic extension to August 15. Form 4868 has details, including various options for getting an extension by filing or paying electronically. There is also a special toll-free number for requesting an extension by phone -

call 1-888-796-1074 by the regular filing deadline. An extension gives extra time for filing only, not for paying any balance due.

Additional last-minute tips are available under “The Newsroom” at IRS.gov and in News Release 2003-47.